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The Young Sports Series

by J. P. Guinon

In the latter part of the last century there were some publications printed for the entertainment of the youth of America that, so far, seem to have been overlooked by those who write on such subjects. One of these, which certainly should not be so neglected, was backed by Richard K. Fox of Police Gazette fame, although in its rather short lifetime his name never appeared in connection with it. This was the Young Sports series, which started out as Young Sports 5c Library, then became, in succession, Young Sports of America, Young People of America, and finally, Young Sports.

Fox published many books and periodicals, but his best effort was his famous pink Police Gazette, a weekly which he had bought in 1876, and, after effecting certain changes therein, produced regularly and with great success for more than a quarter of a century. During this period no American barber shop was considered properly equipped without the latest issue of the Police Gazette for the edification of its customers. The Police Gazette, as all old timers of the he gender know, featured articles on and photos of prize fighters, ball players, jockeys, and other athletes of note, as well as beautiful and shapely ladies of the theater and other pop-

ular professions, whose faces and forms as displayed in its pink pages drew many a male of the gaslight era to the barber shop at frequent intervals, whether he needed the services of such an establishment or not. It is certain that the Police Gazette kept many a barber shop in business, and the barber shops, in turn, by subscribing regularly, made millions of nice tax free dollars for the astute Mr. Fox during those glorious long-gone days in our country's history when a dollar was worth 100 cents.

Mr. Fox, remaining inconspicuously in the background, directed the launching of The Young Sports 5c Library in the latter part of May, 1894, by The Young Sports Publishing Co., 19 Beekman St., New York City. In the beginning it was not a story paper, but a weekly publication devoted almost exclusively to a series of narratives based on the lives and careers of various well-known sports figures. At first, it was no doubt intended to appeal as much to more mature individuals interested in sports, as to the frying-size readers of the period. The first issue was titled "Jockey Fred Faral, King of the Turf"; the next, "Amos Rusie, the Great Pitcher of the New Yorks." Then followed numbers covering the careers of Dave Foutz, the Brooklyn first baseman;

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

Vol. 26 No. 8

August 15, 1958

Whole No. 311

Published Monthly at

821 Vermont Street, Lawrence, Kansas

Edited by

Edward T. LeBlanc, 87 School St., Fall River, Mass.

Entered as second-class matter at the post office at Lawrence, Kansas

Price \$2.00 per year

Assistant Editor

Ralph F. Cummings, Fisherville, Mass.

Asst. Ed. Photography—Charles Duprez, 228 Larch Lane, Smithtown, L.I., N.Y.

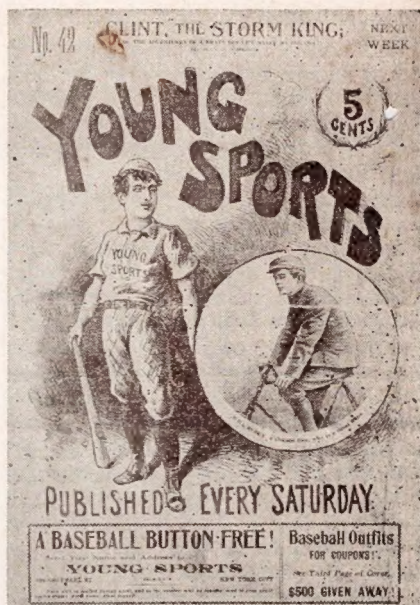
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Ads should be submitted by the 15th of the month in order to assure publication in the following month's issue.

It is a notable coincidence that, just as it had done in its first attempt, Mr. Fox's story-paper folded with No. 43. This was the last issue of Young People of America in spite of a brightly optimistic announcement therein reading as follows: "Two New Serials This Week! A Baseball Story in a Few Weeks! We Will Print a Dick Dart Story Soon! Watch This Column for New Features!" Six serials were left uncompleted in No. 43, which was dated March 21, 1896.

Mr. Stratemeyer, editor of the unfortunate Young People of America, apparently was not unduly perturbed by the failure to get out No. 44, as the following month, April, 1896, he serenely bobbed up, as publisher, with the first issue of Bright Days, described as "A Monthly of Illustrated Stories for Boys and Girls." The three feature tales, all serials, in the first issue were by Edward Stratemeyer, Arthur M. Winfield, and Roy Rockwood, all these authors, of course, being the same indefatigable writer. The address of Bright Days was given as 21 & 23 Ann St., New York City, in the first number, but in the next and all succeeding numbers it was shown as 177 Williams St., which was the same address given for Young People of America. This address seems significant since it seems to indicate that Mr. Fox and his recently defunct Young People of America were tied up in some way with Mr. Stratemeyer and his Bright Days. Another indication is the fact that the latter began to reprint many of the stories that had appeared in the former. It would not be a bad guess that Mr. Fox was the real wheel that turned the machinery of Bright Days, and that some Police Gazette dollars were invested in the project.

But in the meantime, on July 4, 1896, appeared the first issue of Young Sports, marking another revival of Mr. Fox's hard-to-kill publication. The resurrection was announced by the "new" publishers, namely, The Varieties Publishing Co., Box 40, 338-40 Pearl St., New York City. The



ubiquitous Frank J. Earll graced the editor's seat, and immediately began turning out stories under his three favorite pseudonyms, "Old Sport," "Billy Boxer," and "Timekeeper."



Stratemeyer, no doubt having his hands full with *Bright Days*, was not in evidence, but Lisenbee, Taggart, and Browne were still contributing, and John H. Whitson had been added to the staff, as well as the once-famous author of the Harkaway stories, Bracebridge Hemming.

Hemming, no longer in great demand as a writer, had returned to England nearly twenty years before, after losing his fancy \$10,000 job with Frank Leslie. Nearly at the end of his career, he was making a living practicing law, and selling stories whenever and wherever possible, and it is said that it wasn't very often possible. He must have welcomed a regular assignment with *Young Sports*, and after several of his stories had appeared therein, he produced a Harkaway serial, probably his first in many years, and no doubt his last. The title was "Jack Harkaway, the Millionaire Sport; or, a Brave Boy's Battles Across the Continent." Jack's father, described as a New York millionaire, dies in the first chapter, leaving young Jack, whose mother is already dead, his entire collection of long green. Jack utilizes some of the money to buy a yacht, a racing stable and a few other necessities, and travels across the country with his chum, Dick Darton, engaging in races, prize fights, etc., in his spare time making love to his girl friend, Fedora Vining, who seems to be always available, and feuding with a rascally uncle and a couple of the latter's henchmen who want very much to eliminate Jack in order that the uncle can inherit Jack's fortune. In the end, in true Hemming style, everybody seems to get killed except Jack, Fedora, (whom he marries), and his chum, Dick. For some reason, no mention is made anywhere in the story of Mole, Harvey, Hunston, Monday, Emily, Harry Girdwood or any of the other characters who strutted the stage with the original Jack Harkaway in previous stories and were as well known to Harkaway fans as Jack himself.

In addition to featuring Hemming

and other well-known authors, *Young Sports* in many other ways made a valiant bid for patronage. Besides a variety of serials and shorts, there were sketches, poems, jokes, and special departments. It was profusely illustrated with photos and drawings, many of the latter, however, being crudely executed. There were contests in many fields, with gold pieces, cameras, bicycles, etc., for the winners. For almost a year it carried on with every indication of success. Once again it reached No. 43, and this time it did not stop there. That particular issue carried an announcement of many improvements to be made in *Young Sports*, including the addition of four pages to its present sixteen.

But again, as in its two previous attempts, Mr. Fox's story-paper began to wobble. A few numbers were published after the jinx issue, No. 43, and then, for the third and last time, *Young Sports* departed from the story-paper field.

Editorial mistakes may have brought about the final collapse of *Young Sports*, just as they had done for some of its predecessors and would in future do for many of its successors. One such blunder should be mentioned, as it may well have been the monkey wrench that did the most to wreck Mr. Fox's machine:

Beginning with No. 34, the publishers began ballyhooing a serial entitled "The Pirate's Treasure; or, The Hidden Hoard of Captain Flint," scheduled to start in No. 37, and written by the famous author, Robert Louis Stevenson, whose "Treasure Island" had been read by practically every youth and most of the adults in America and England. A new story by this writer was interesting news indeed, and the appearance of the first installment of "The Pirate's Treasure" was awaited with some eagerness by the readers of *Young Sports*. The fact that Stevenson had been dead for nearly three years was not mentioned, somehow, in the afore-said ballyhoo.

Imagine the let-down experienced by these readers when "The Pirate's

Treasure" turned out to be merely a reprint of "Treasure Island"! Even the reputedly unsophisticated kid of the gentle nineties couldn't have been expected to take such a kick in the pants without some sort of protest. It is doubtful if even Rollo or Little Lord Fauntleroy would have stood for it.

How the publishers could have pulled such a boner as to attempt to pass off, as new, a story that was old stuff years before Mr. Fox ever thought of the Young Sports series, is hard for us to figure today, but better publications than Young Sports had in the past and would in the future go broke because of that same short-sighted policy of trying to bamboozle their readers with reprints. Evidently the average editor of those days fully believed, as so many others did, that readers of cheap literature possessed little more intelligence than chimpanzees, even as today the concoctors of most of the TV commercials must rate their audiences.

Without doubt, for thousands of readers No. 37 of Young Sports was the last issue. It is quite likely that their abandonment of this story-paper was the real knockout punch that laid it low. Not many publications can survive such heavy blows to the circulation.

"The Pirate's Treasure" was still running in No. 43, but its end was near, and so was the end of Young Sports. It is probable that they made their exit together, and this time Mr. Fox evidently had had enough.

Some questions about the Young Sports series are still unanswered, and will probably remain so unless someone familiar with the subject will come forward with the informa-

tion. For instance: Were the serials in No. 43, the last issue of Young People of America, ever finished, and if so, when and where? And what was the number and date of the last issue of Young Sports?

MEMORIES OF THE BOYS BEST WEEKLY

by Howard B. Silsbee

The thing that got me interested in the hobby of collecting Dime Novels again in my fifties dated back to an experience I had with them in 1910.

I was an avid fan of the Boys Best Weekly and my hero was Jack Standfast. I used to read and reread them at any moment I could squeeze in. I had the complete set of 58 issues. I was constantly late to school because of them and my mother kept warning me that if I didn't stop being late because of them she would take the entire bunch and throw them in the furnace. The day came when she had to make good her threat and in they went. My heart was broken and continued to be for weeks and months. My mother, bless her heart, who is now in her 80's has often said how much she regretted having done this because I was actually sick for weeks over their loss.

I read an article a few years ago about Eli Messier's collection and I wrote him. To make a long story short he finally furnished me with all but a few of them and gradually Ralph Smith helped me out with the others. Was I a happy "boy" to have my collection back again!

Now, what I would like to know, is there another person in our fraternity that is really gone on Jack Standfast or is there another one who has the complete set? (I know the Editor, Eddie LeBlanc has. Are there any others?)

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MENTION THIS MAGAZINE
WHEN ANSWERING ADS

NEWSY NEWS

by Ralph F. Cummings
Fisherville, Mass.

Mr. Walter Coslet reports that University Microfilms of Ann Arbor, Michigan, now offer a facsimile service. Reproductions of books, manuscripts, magazines—what have you—at 3c per page plus 70c for soft (paper) binding—but a minimum charge of \$2.50 for any single volume. You can send in your own volumes for reproduction—or if you want a non-available item, tell them where they can locate a copy. In some cases there may be an extra 2c per page additional for negatives if they can't get a microfilm made in their own establishment, or can't obtain the book. However, if they can be shown a market for further reprints (no reduction in price for quantity), they may absorb this extra charge themselves.

I wonder if "we" shouldn't investigate this and get together with all of our members who would want a run of certain dime novels bound together to get the \$2.50 "value." It wouldn't pay to reproduce less than 60 pages this way.

Robert Traetschel, of Pittsburgh, Pa., sent in a 2 page affair, from the Pittsburgh Press, shows "The Good Old Days," of youngster reading a Jules Verne "From Earth to the Moon," and his pop has the lid of the stove, and has his son throw it in, and also another picture of now, of "sputniks, missiles, satellites, etc." He's wishing his pa was alive now, to see the big change in the world today. And what a change is right.

H. A. Duchesne of Portland, Maine says he's been enjoying himself in reading "Johannsen's House of Beadles" for the last two months. Some

real reading in those 2 volumes, you bet, and the most interesting that can be had. Prof. Johannsen sure had his hands full when he wrote up those 2 volumes.

Well, Jim Martin has been out to the gold fields, trying to find the "Old Dutchman" lost mine, but didn't have much luck. Guess it's been found and all dug out long ago.

Geo. French went to the hospital for a double hernia operation on Mar. 9th, and was to be out in 2 wks. as I haven't heard how he made out. I'm in hopes he is on the mend again and stays healthy hereafter.

As one of our new members of Happy Hours Brotherhood is Gerald J. McIntosh, I came across a letter he sent me way back on Nov. 29th, 1920, when he lived at Lecompte, La. Heap long time, we were kids at that time, now we are, well a little older as a fellow says, 38 years ago. One other member I've known longer is Ralph P. Smith, since 1917 or 1918. How times fly.

An old timer I haven't heard from for quite a while is S. B. Condon, So. Penobscott, Maine. He has some novels for sale.

EXCHANGE COLUMN

Will swap bound volume (1875) of Oliver Optic's Magazine; covers a bit loose; corners worn, contents fine, for offer in novels or story papers. Robert H. Smeltzer, 3432 No. Bodine St., Philadelphia 40, Pa.

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